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Dear Mr. Haas:

I have been asked to reply to your letter of March 16 addressed to Assistant Secretary Douglas J. Bennet, Jr. I regret that you found our responses to congressional inquiries on the John Victor Stoen custody case unsatisfactory.

The attorney's favorable opinion expressed in these responses is that of Clarence Hughes, The Stoens' attorney in Guyana.

On February 24 the American Consul in Georgetown, Guyana met with the new Minister of Justice, Mohamed Shahabuddeen who stated that child custody cases are civil disputes and there is no legal requirement that hearings be scheduled within a specific time period. Further, the Minister indicated that a judge's written opinion may take at least four months to compose and release. Consequently, the delay to date in this case is not considered excessive.

The Department appreciates the Stoens' desire to be reunited with their son. Although the Department cannot intervene in this case, it will continue to take appropriate measures to ensure that the decision is reached fairly and in accordance with the laws of Guyana.

I am forwarding a copy of your letter to the Department's Office of the Legal Advisor for comment on the issue of the interpretation of international law. If you have further questions, please contact our Consular Services on 632-3015.

Sincerely,

Stephen A. Dobrenchuk
Chief
Emergency and Protection
Service Division

Jeffrey A. Haas, Esquire
3609 Sacramento Street
San Francisco, California 94118

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